



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics  
Agricultural Research Service

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SUBJECT: Recruitment for ARS Positions

TO: Supervisors and Managers

FROM: Karen M. Brownell /s/  
Director, Human Resources Division

Cecelia A. Stortzum /s/  
Director, ARS Recruitment Office

As a supervisor or manager in the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), it is your responsibility, with the advice and assistance of your servicing Human Resources Specialist, to make decisions related to filling vacant positions on your staff. In doing so, several issues that you should consider when recruiting to fill your positions are (1) the area of consideration used to solicit applications for your positions, (2) whether you should use available recruitment incentives to entice "high quality" applicants to accept your offer of a position, and (3) your role in making the official offer of employment.

Since 1998, the agency has placed an increased emphasis on the need to fill category 1 and category 4 scientist positions. This focus has been extremely successful as the number of "SYs" has increased from 1825 on-board in 1997 to 2103 as of January 2003. This accomplishment is a direct result of your efforts to recruit and hire the best-qualified available candidates. Typically, SY positions are advertised on a nation-wide basis and recruitment incentives are used when needed (e.g., above the minimum pay, relocation expenses, recruitment bonuses, etc.). While recruitment for SY positions continues to be an agency priority, it is recognized that approximately seventy-five percent of ARS positions are non-SYs and the timely staffing of these positions is also important.

When conducting discussions related to your vacant positions with your servicing Human Resources Specialist, you should keep in mind the following guidance:

**Area of Consideration (AOC):** The AOC used in your vacancy announcement represents the "organizational or geographic area in which you will conduct a search for eligible candidates." Permanent ARS vacancies are advertised through Merit Promotion



or Alternative Merit Promotion (restricted to candidates with competitive service status), the ARS Demonstration (DEMO) Project Authority (consider all U.S. citizens), or both.

While you have some discretion in designating the AOC, you should ensure that the AOC you use will result in a broad and diverse applicant pool. In most cases, permanent positions advertised under DEMO must be open to all U.S. citizens nation-wide. Exceptions to this AOC will be allowed only when documentation is available to show that advertising in the local commuting area will produce a sufficiently broad and diverse applicant pool. Your servicing Human Resources Specialist is responsible for documenting the recruitment case file to show why the AOC has been limited to the local commuting area. Considerations would be the number (both size and diversity) of qualified candidates for previous recruitment efforts within the limited AOC and current geographical labor market conditions.

**Recruitment Incentives:** To help you recruit candidates for your positions, many recruitment incentives have been approved for use. These recruitment incentives are outlined in P&P 412.5, Recruitment and Retention Incentives and Other Special Pay. A summarized version of the available recruitment incentives is enclosed for your information. The recruitment incentives outlined may be used for General Schedule positions at any grade level as well as for Wage Grade positions, provided that the criteria described in the P&P are met and the requisite approvals have been obtained. These recruitment incentives are designed to assist you in your efforts to attract and retain the best qualified employees for your positions.

**Offers of Employment:** Official offers of employment (including payment of recruitment incentives) can only be made by the servicing Human Resources Specialist. As the selecting official, you can advise the potential selectee that they have been tentatively selected for the position but the official offer of employment will be made by the servicing Human Resources Specialist. You should advise the candidate **not** to give notice at their current job or make any travel arrangements until they have been officially offered the position by the servicing Human Resources Specialist.

If you have questions about the information provided in this memo or the enclosed document, please contact your servicing Human Resources Specialist.

Enclosure

cc:

Administrators Council  
Administrative & Financial Management Council  
Location Administrative Officers  
HRD Branch Chiefs and Servicing Specialists  
Recruitment Advisory Council

## SUMMARY OF RECRUITMENT INCENTIVES

1. **Superior Qualifications Appointment:** While most new appointments in the Federal service are made at the minimum rate for the grade level (step 1), this authority can be used to make an offer above the step 1 level based on a candidate's superior qualifications with consideration to salary comparability. In order to be considered, the individual must be a new hire into the Federal civilian service or have a break in service of 90 days or more.
  
2. **Demonstration Project Cash Payment (DEMO) or Recruitment Bonus (non-DEMO):**
  - **DEMO Cash Payment:** This authority allows ARS managers to offer cash payments to new DEMO hires. There is no limit to the amount of cash payment under DEMO (provided that the aggregate Federal compensation cap is not exceeded for the year). Permanent Federal employees and former permanent Federal employees with a break in service of less than 180 days are not eligible to receive these payments. A 12 month service agreement (a written agreement between REE and an employee under which the employee agrees to a specified period of employment) is required.
  - **Recruitment Bonus:** Under this authority, new non-DEMO hires may be paid a lump sum of up to 25% of their entry basic pay level. This authority may be considered for use with permanent and non-permanent hires including appointments of new postdoctoral research associates. Current permanent Federal employees and former employees with a break in service of less than 90 days are not eligible. A 12 month service agreement is required.
  
3. **Relocation Bonus:** Under this authority, current Federal employees may be authorized a cash payment of up to 25% of the individual's basic pay if assigned to an agency position outside the individual's current geographic area; the employee must establish a residence in the new commuting area before the bonus may be paid. A 12 month service agreement is required.
  
4. **Travel Expenses for Pre-employment Interviews:** In accordance with the Federal Travel Regulations, the agency may fund all or part of the travel costs associated with a pre-employment interview.
  
5. **Travel and Transportation Expenses:** Under this authority, you may authorize travel and transportation expenses for a candidate who would have to relocate in order to accept an ARS position. For DEMO hires, the agency may fund all, some, or none of the travel expenses. For non-DEMO hires authorized payment of first post of duty travel expenses, all covered "first duty station" expenses must be funded. If travel expenses are authorized for a current permanent/term employee, **all** covered expenses must be funded as specified in the Federal Travel Regulations. A 12 month service agreement is required.

6. **Student Loan Repayments:** ARS may authorize loan repayment benefits for all or a portion of outstanding student loans to a candidate who has been offered employment or a current employee of the agency. The loan must be Federally insured and the repayment amount may not exceed \$6,000 per year or \$40,000 in aggregate for an employee's career. A three year service agreement is required.

The above information represents a brief overview on the available recruitment incentives. For details, contact your servicing Human Resources Specialist or refer to REE P&P No. 412.5, Recruitment and Retention Incentives and Other Special Pay, at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/412-05.htm>.

Questions related to the payment of travel expenses under the Federal Travel Regulations should be discussed with your servicing Human Resources Specialist and appropriate area/office staff responsible for travel related activities.